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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a model parent support program which would identify and coordinate existing community resources in an effort to help meet the varied needs of parents (particularly expectant adolescents, new parents and single parents) during pregnancy and the first few months of their children's lives. The components of this program would include training for basic childrearing and family life such as child development, nutrition, health care, child management, home environment planning, family role, and realization of the individual's potential as a parent. In addition, delivery systems for professional advice and care related to health, nutrition, or financial needs and other social services, would be mobilized. Other resources such as a toy lending library, collections of reading materials for parents, baby-sitting services, quality day and/or home care would be located or developed. Strategies for implementation of this model would include making a survey of available community resources, preparing a statement of program objectives, and developing a delivery system, using resources already available in the community. The program plan would be presented to potential members of a multidisciplinary team of professionals and volunteers. Interested team members would then be involved in planning, implementing, and continuously evaluating a locally-appropriate program. (JMB)

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ABSTRACT

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A STRATEGY FOR LOCATING AND BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR THE EXPECTANT AND THE NEW PARENT

by

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Many young parents experience a sense of helplessness when first confronted with new parenthood. A program which creates a continuing source of information and support for them during pregnancy and the first few months of their child's life is needed. This program would be especially valuable to the expectant adolescent, the young/new parent, the single parent, or the young family isolated from family due to mobility and other isolating factors. Delivery of a program designed to meet the varied needs of these parents would involve a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, volunteers, and agencies, and could be developed and supported with resources and professionals already available in the community.

The model for such a program, presented in this paper, can be realized in any community using its own unique characteristics and resources. Almost every community has committed and concerned professionals delivering services related to these needs of new parents but not organized to tie these services together to create a continual program readily available to child-rearing and family areas such as child development, nutrition, health care, child management, home environment planning, family roles, development of potential for parenting, and the like. Development of a local program using this model would enable the community to do this. Resource programs such as a toy lending library, collections of reading materials for parents, baby-sitting services, quality day and/or home care may be located or developed as a part of the basic program or planned for future development in the program.

Strategies for implementation of this model include a survey of the available community resources, statement of program objectives, and the development of delivery systems using resources already available in the community. The program plan would then be presented to the various potential team members with assistance in helping them discover and develop the role(s) each might play in the program. Interested team members would then be involved in planning, implementing, and continuously evaluating a locally-appropriate program.

Implementation of a program based on this model can create an ongoing system of training and support which would not cease to function due to a lack of continuing funding. It would, instead, be a solidly-established program which might be enriched through inclusion of additional agencies and other resources and funding, but which would depend for its life on local, committed, established resources.

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A STRATEGY FOR LOCATING AND BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR THE EXPECTANT AND THE NEW PARENT

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The realization that parenting is a neglected area of concern in our society is becoming more and more evident in the current literature, in both the popular press and in professional journals. Most family and women's magazines carry regular columns of advice to parents and almost every issue of local newspapers feature child-rearing information. There is increasing awareness that there may be more to effective parenting than instinct or "doing what comes naturally", because of the increasing evidence that something is lacking in too many children's lives and home relationships. One reason may be that it is difficult to adjust to being a parent and some individuals see parenthood only as "...a disruptive, upsetting 'crisis' in a family. But rearing children is a normal human experience." (p. 22, THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF PARENTHOOD)

However, contrary to popular thought and according to overwhelming evidence in the literature (Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1958; Cairns, 1966; Scott, 1963), parenting does not appear to be instinctual, but is rather the product of parent-child bonding. Callahan says:

> "When we talk of a parental instinct, we mean a complex learning produced by a combination of psychobiological and cultural factors... some inherited innate thrust to survive, to reproduce one's own kind, to mate sexually is entwined with an experientially produced need to love, to live in a caring group, to gain status as an adult, to identify with one's parents and reproduce social reality...biocultural evolution has selected for altruistic parenting...The earliest and strongest bonds exist between parental caretakers and the infant...Successful parental protection and nurturing of offspring require active effort, self confidence, and dominance over the environment...thinking and feeling." (Callahan, 1974, p. 102)

Therefore, we may assume that parenting is one of those groups of actions and attitudes that may benefit from instruction, modeling and education.

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In his discussion concerning whether parents are born or made, Callahan reveals his bias toward the latter when he states:

> "...I would say that heredity and physiological factors can be the primary determiners of an individual's developmental destiny only when it is grossly deviant from group norms. ...if inherited genetic characteristics are in the range of normal or above, then psychosocial stimuli will be the primary factors in an individual's development. Still, confusion comes from the fact that in every different situation various degrees of interaction of physiology and psyche will have different results...Our inability to make accurate predictions reveals a fundamental lack of knowledge. The same complexity and ignorance handicap our understanding of parental development." (Callahan, 1974, pp. 161-162)

The parent, either young and new to parenting or older and somewhat experienced with young children, continues to be an individual with his own developmental tasks (Erikson) to deal with as he attempts to meet the demands and needs of his child. In THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF PARENTHOOD, the point is emphasized that parents' personal needs, especially those of the young or new parent, are often in conflict with their need to be a parent although they may be unaware of these personal needs. Strong cultural influences in the United States emphasize and value the care of the young above and sometimes at the expense of the needs of adults. Parenthood should be seen as one phase in the continuing development of individual human beings, which is not static or even final. This development continues throughout life and is constantly changing. The authors state that:

> "Parenthood should be a creative self-growth experience and not an onerous guilt-ladden duty that saddles parents with full responsibility for any results that are less than perfect. Parents are not the only influence on their children. Social institutions also shape the personality of the child. Nor can parents devote all their resources to rearing their children. Part of their inner resources must remain available for their own continuing development as adults." (CPEGAP, 1973, p. 19)

In recognition of the sense of helplessness often experienced by the expectant young parent and especially the parent of the newborn child, programs which create a continuing source of information and support to which they may turn, are needed in most communities. The dramatic and drastic changes in life style of recent years have increasingly separated young new parents from home and family at a critical time in their lives. Becoming a new parent can be overwhelming for a young parent

unprepared for reality because:

> "The transition to parenthood is abrupt. One day alone; the next the sudden imposition of twenty-four-hour care and responsibility for a totally dependent infant. The mother's deep psychological and physiological functions help her to act as a mother, but though she receives meaning and gratification from her intimate relation with the infant, her need is relative and not absolute. The baby, on the other hand, has an absolute need for its mother...or for somebody who will perform the same functions she does. She gives and gives to the child, but the child cannot give her everything that she needs. The greater the degree to which sole responsibility for the newborn infant is placed on her, the greater is her degree of social deprivation." (CPEGAP, 1973, pp. 21-22)

A number of programs designed to assist the new and/or young parent have been planned, funded, and implemented around the country throughout recent years. Many of them have been outstanding in their contribution to young families. These programs may involve agencies, volunteers, professional personnel, assessment of needs and training for parenthood, and similar services and have, in many instances been well-conceived and effectively implemented. However, in most cases, such programs were dependent on special funding for a narrowly defined group of recipients or on continuing funding, then were allowed to fade away, shrink, or disappear altogether when funding was cut back or withdrawn.

Some programs with demonstrated effectiveness have been continued by other agencies after funding had ceased. One of these is Project HAPPE in Wisconsin, a comprehensive parent-training program, developed by a Federal grant. It is now being implemented by local school systems as a regular program ( ) Another interesting program was initiated by Miami University of Ohio alumni in Cincinnati. In this program, mothers were trained to teach their own children in a preschool setting. Because of its success, the city of Cincinnati has chosen to fund the program so that it may continue. (Bogner, 1977, pp. 500-501)

The January issue of Childhood Education reports an effective public school program in Montgomery County, Maryland, which through cooperation with the Department of Adult Education, presents a comprehensive Life Cycle Approach to Parent Education. In a series of courses involving interested parents, "group members provide much information, advice and support for each other, along with many side benefits

such as information of baby-sitting cooperatives and opportunity to see other couples socially. The class also provides a chance for parents to see infants at various levels of development...helping those with very young children to see what lies ahead, enabling those with 'older' infants to be important conveyors of information in the development process." (Edmister, 1977, pp. 124-125) This course, called Parent-Infant Development, is offered in school facilities throughout the country. These groups contain parents with "similar interests and concerns with whom new parents can share information; learn basics of normal growth and development; meet with resource people such as pediatricians, psychologists, nutrition experts and others; and discuss in depth mutual interests and concerns." (Edmister, 1977, p. 124) A number of other courses are offered to meet the needs of parents of older children and addressed to various aspects of child development (Learning Language, When Parents Remarry, Separation and Divorce, Seminar for Single Parents, etc.), covering the "Life Cycle" of child-parent and family relationships. It appears to be an outstanding program keyed to commonly-recognized needs of parents, children, and families.

RESOURCES OF THE COMMUNITY

It is our intention to describe a model program which may be implemented in any community using existing resources. While in many aspects it is similar to those already described, outside resources and funding would be needed only for the expansion and/or enrichment of the basic program. It is the belief of the authors, in designing this model, that every community already has a number of agencies, individuals, and groups which may be mobilized to assist and support the new parent through the important, often confusing, and even frightening days before the birth of the baby and during the early months of the child's life. Of those services already available in the community, one

drawback is that they tend to be disjointed, isolated programs. There is a lack of continuity of support systems. Thus, a focus of the model is to identify the existent service programs and volunteer agencies and expand the total services available by tying them together. Also, this effort to unify agencies will stimulate the creation of new needed services.

In our increasingly mobile society, many young/new parents are separated from their own parents, other relatives and old family friends at this time of important changes in their lives. They have no one to whom they can turn when they feel the need for advice and/or reassurance at times of crisis and uncertainty related to the new parnet, to the single parent, or to any family affected by isolating factors in our society.

The intention of the authors is to create a plan that can be realized in any community, using its own characteristics, meeting its individually determined needs, and using its unique available resources. In order to deliver the kind of program which truly meets the varied needs of these parents, a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and volunteers is essential. Almost every community has committed and concerned professionals delivering services related to these needs but not organized to tie the services together to create a continual program readily available to the new parent. This kind of coordinated program can be delivered by raising the issues with each member of this potential program team. With these professionals and potential sources of volunteer participants, such as civic groups, retired teachers, and other elderly citizens, a clearly-defined program may be implemented. This kind of program, although non-existent in most areas, can be developed and supported primarily with resources and professionals already available in the community.

The components of this program would include training for basic child-rearing and family life such as child development, nutrition, health care, child management, home environment planning, family role, realization of the individual's

potential as a parent, and the like. In addition, delivery systems for professional advice and care related to health, nutrition, or financial needs and other social services, would be mobilized. Other resource programs such as a toy lending library, collections of reading materials for parents, baby-sitting services. quality day and/or home care, would be located or developed.

In this paper, we will attempt to describe a model which any community might implement in order to provide for individuals in need of such services. The model indicates how such a community may:

1. Locate, identify, and contact potential sources of participants (recipients and deliverers of services) in a program designed to meet the needs of young parents in a specific community.

2. Determine and state objectives for the program.

3. Design a plan for delivery and communication with potential resource and recipient participants.

4. Implement the plan designed according to the individual, unique model program of that community.

5. Evaluate all components of the program. This evaluation would be continuous by all participants with additional assessment at any level by planners and/or implementers according to the stated objectives of the program.

THE MODEL

When an initiating individual, agency, or organization has determined a need for such a support system for new parents, the initial strategy for implementation of the model includes a survey of the available resources in the community and the development of concepts and programs using and integrating available resources which already exist in that particular community.

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insert figure #1 here

Objectives for the program would then be determined and specified with input from potential team members. This tentative program would then be presented to the various potential team members. The initiator would assist them in determining and developing the role(s) they might play in the program. Interested potential team members would then be brought together for planning in order to establish roles, to identify resources, and to create a schedule of implementation.

insert figure #2 here

The purpose of this program is to create an ongoing system of training and support for parents of young children which does not cease to function because of lack of continuing funding. Instead, it is created through involving solidly-established resources. Although capable of being enriched by funding and other additional resources, the project will not be dependent upon them for its existence.

The delivery of the program would, of course, by its very nature, be unique in each community. However, the first step would necessarily involve an individual, an agency, or a group which recognizes and is concerned about an observed need in the community, to serve as an initiator for development of the model. This initiator may or may not be the implementer for the model. However, the initiator will set things in motion. The implementer may emerge or may need to be chosen to facilitate communication among all participants in the model. The implementer's role is to maintain the program and its services for the recipients and to facilitate communication between all resource participants and the recipients.

insert figure #3 here

The goal of this paper has been to present a model unique in its potential for drawing together various resources which already exist in the community but which may need to be unified to provide effectively for parents and their children. Each of these services is helpful in and of itself, but all services are greatly enhanced through becoming part of a system of continuous and interrelated services.

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Figure I: IDENTIFYING Resources AND RECIPIENTS

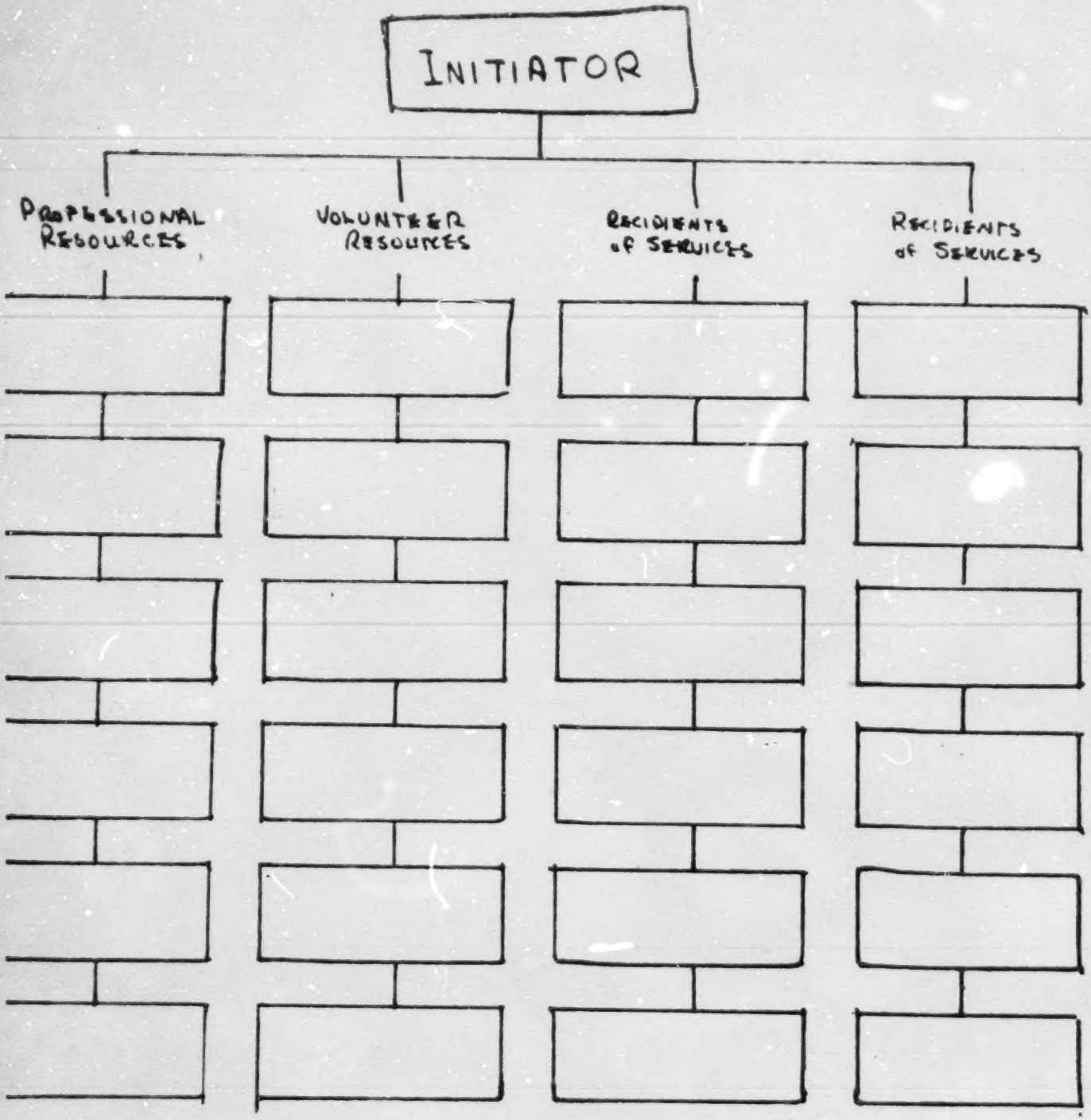
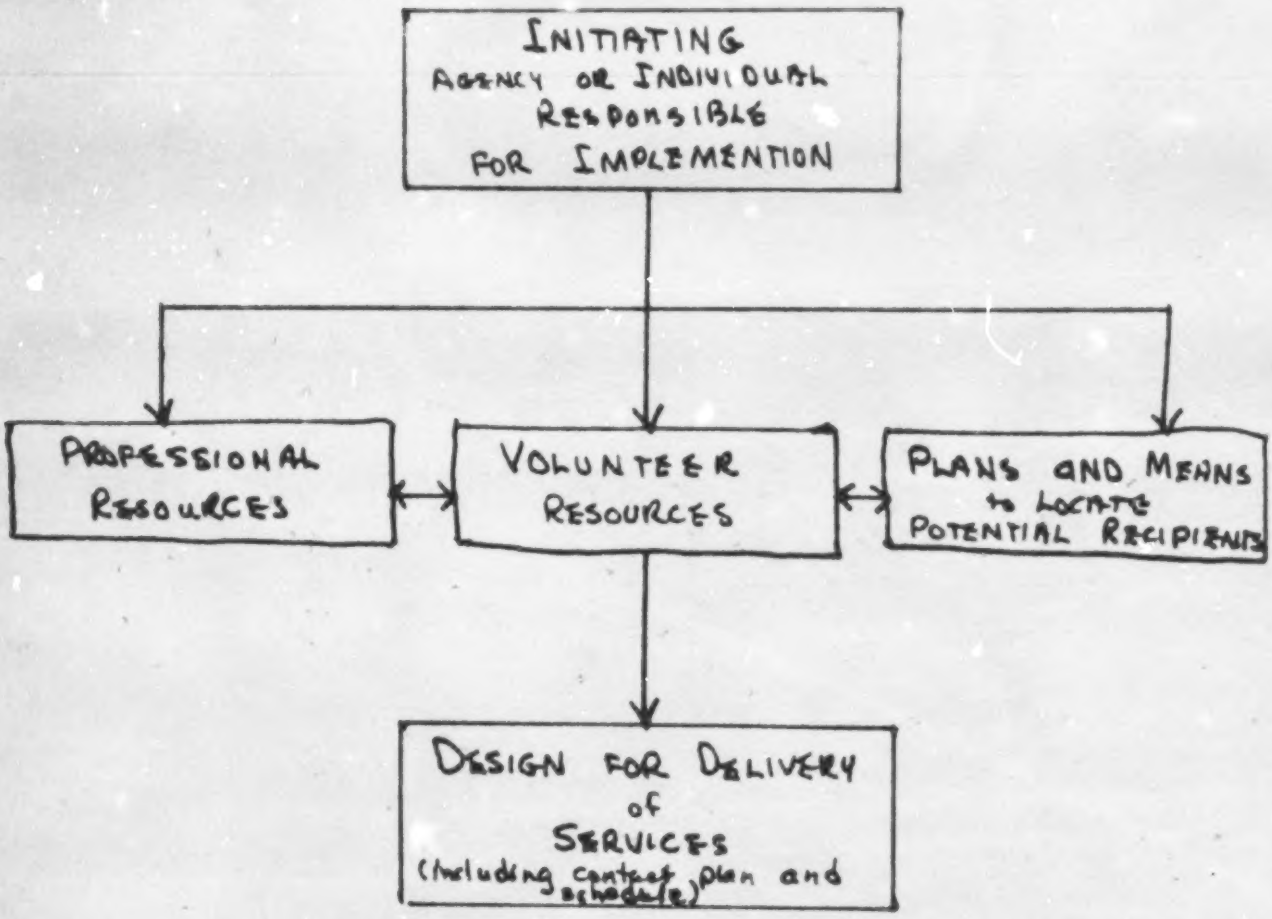
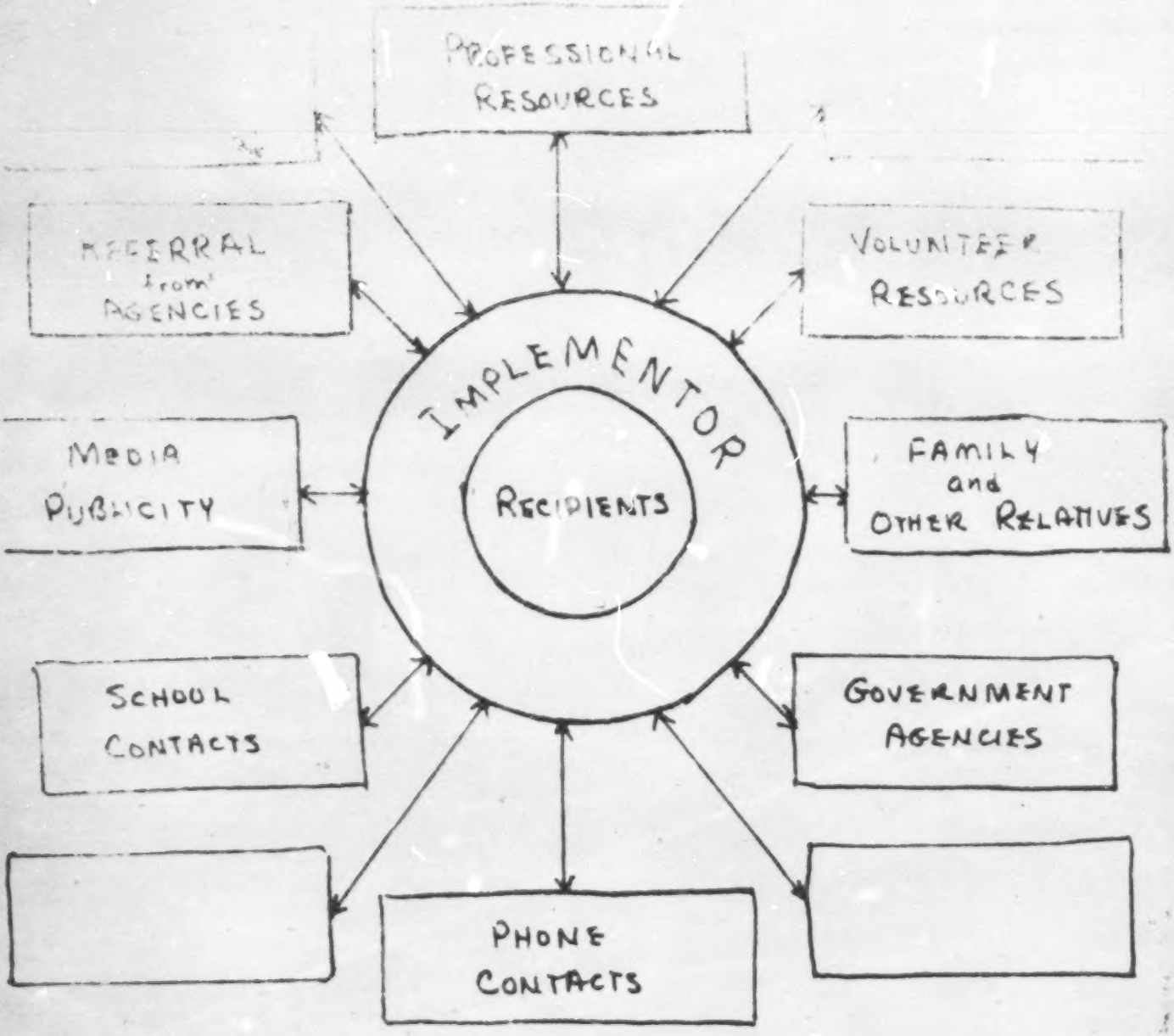


Figure 2: PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SERVICES

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